

CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name: Easement application for the installation of a new overhead power distribution line.

Proposed Implementation Date: Fall 2012

Proponent: Marias River Electric Cooperative, Inc., PO Box 729, Shelby, MT 59474

Location: E2E2, S2S2, Section 16, T33N, R2W

County: Toole

Trust: Common Schools (CS)

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Marias River Electric Cooperative, Inc. has requested to install a new overhead power distribution line across one tract of state land. The proposed easement route is located along the Kelleher Road on the East edge and the Mozer Road on the South edge of Section 16, T33N, R2W. The overhead distribution line will be single-pole construction. There will be 39 new poles, 2 guy wires, and 2 anchors installed on the state land. The voltage of the distribution line will be 12.47 KV.

Township	Range	Section	Overhead Distribution Line Location	Acres Affected	Trust
33N	2W	16	E2E2, S2S2	4.834	CS

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED:

Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.

Marias River Electric Cooperative, Inc-Proponent
DNRC-Surface Owner
Donald & Debra Mecham-Surface Lessee, Lease #3515
FSA-CRP administrator, Section 16, T33N, R2W

2. OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED:

DNRC is not aware of any other agencies with jurisdiction or other permits needed to complete this project.

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Alternative A (No Action) – Deny Marias River Electric Cooperative, Inc permission to install the new overhead power distribution line.

Alternative B (the Proposed action) – Grant Marias River Electric Cooperative, Inc permission to install the new overhead power distribution line.

III. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

- *RESOURCES* potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.
- Explain **POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS** following each resource heading.
- Enter "NONE" if no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.

4. GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE:

Consider the presence of fragile, compactable or unstable soils. Identify unusual geologic features. Specify any special reclamation considerations. Identify any cumulative impacts to soils.

Soils at the proposed project sites are silty in texture. The topography is gently rolling and the new overhead power distribution line will be installed just off of existing roads. The soils and slopes are generally suitable for the installation of the new overhead power distribution line. Equipment will cause localized areas of soil compaction and will disturb the soil where the power poles are installed. Reclamation requirements are to compact and level the disturbed soil beside the power poles. Then seed the impacted area as required with the existing grass types and seeding rates that are listed in item 7 of this assessment. Cumulative impacts on soil resources are not expected as only minimal surface disturbance will be caused by the construction of the new overhead power distribution line.

5. WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION:

Identify important surface or groundwater resources. Consider the potential for violation of ambient water quality standards, drinking water maximum contaminant levels, or degradation of water quality. Identify cumulative effects to water resources.

There is one water right #41N-18400-00 associated with Section 16, T33N, R2W. This water right is for surface water from Hall coulee located in the NE4SE4NE4. This water right is located in the proposed construction area, but it will not be impacted as the proposed power distribution line will be overhead. Other water quality and/or quantity issues will not be impacted by the proposed action.

6. AIR QUALITY:

What pollutants or particulate would be produced? Identify air quality regulations or zones (e.g. Class I air shed) the project would influence. Identify cumulative effects to air quality.

The proposed action will not impact the air quality.

7. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY:

What changes would the action cause to vegetative communities? Consider rare plants or cover types that would be affected. Identify cumulative effects to vegetation.

Vegetation will be minimally impacted as 2.00 miles of new overhead power distribution line will be installed. The vegetation consists of CRP and will be reseeded using a FSA approved seeding mix consisting primarily of introduced species. Noxious and annual weeds within the proposed construction areas are a concern, but this concern will be mitigated as the applicants are responsible for controlling weeds within the construction areas. Cumulative impacts on the vegetative resources are not expected as the proposed construction areas will be reclaimed and reseeded. The CRP reseeding mixture will consist of a grass seed mixture of 35% Western Wheatgrass, 35% Pubescent Wheatgrass, 20% Crested Wheatgrass, and 10% Alfalfa. If drilled the rate will be 8#/acre, but if broadcast seeded, the rate will be doubled.

A review of Natural Heritage data through the NRIS was conducted and there were no plant species of concern noted or potential species of concern noted on the NRIS survey.

8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS:

Consider substantial habitat values and use of the area by wildlife, birds or fish. Identify cumulative effects to fish and wildlife.

The area is not considered critical wildlife habitat. However, this tract provides habitat for a variety of big game species (mule deer, whitetail deer, pronghorn antelope), predators (coyote, fox, badger), upland game birds (sharp tail grouse, Hungarian partridge), other non-game mammals, raptors and various songbirds. The proposal does not include any land use change which would yield changes to the wildlife habitat. The proposed action will not impact wildlife forage, cover, or traveling corridors. Nor will this action change the juxtaposition of wildlife forage, water, or hiding and thermal cover. Wildlife usage is expected to return to "normal" (pre-action usage) following the installation of the new overhead power distribution line. The proposed action will not have long-term negative effects on existing wildlife species and/or wildlife habitat.

9. UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES:

Consider any federally listed threatened or endangered species or habitat identified in the project area. Determine effects to wetlands. Consider Sensitive Species or Species of special concern. Identify cumulative effects to these species and their habitat.

There are no threatened or endangered species, sensitive habitat types, or other species of special concern associated with the proposed project area. At this time, no known unique, endangered, fragile or limited environmental resources have been identified within the proposed project area.

A review of Natural Heritage data through the NRIS was conducted for T33N, R2W. There was two animal species of concern and zero potential species of concern noted on the NRIS survey: Birds—Ferruginous Hawk and Chestnut-collared Longspur. This particular tract of CRP does not contain many, if any of these species. If any are present, they will be dispersed into the surrounding permanent cover and return to the project area once it is completed.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

Identify and determine effects to historical, archaeological or paleontological resources.

Patrick Rennie, DNRC archaeologist, was contacted about the proposed project. He stated that due to the tract being previously farmed, no historical, archaeological, or paleontological resources would be present.

11. AESTHETICS:

Determine if the project is located on a prominent topographic feature, or may be visible from populated or scenic areas. What level of noise, light or visual change would be produced? Identify cumulative effects to aesthetics.

Installation of the new overhead power distribution line will not affect the aesthetics of the land in any way as it will be adjacent to an existing overhead power transmission line.

12. DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AIR OR ENERGY:

Determine the amount of limited resources the project would require. Identify other activities nearby that the project would affect. Identify cumulative effects to environmental resources.

The demand on environmental resources such as land, water, air, or energy will not be affected by the proposed action. The proposed action will not consume resources that are limited in the area. There are no other projects in the area that will affect the proposed project.

13. OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO THE AREA:

List other studies, plans or projects on this tract. Determine cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of current private, state or federal actions in the analysis area, and from future proposed state actions in the analysis area that are under MEPA review (scoped) or permitting review by any state agency.

There are no other projects or plans being considered on the tract listed on this EA.

IV. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION

- *RESOURCES* potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.
- Explain **POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS** following each resource heading.
- Enter "NONE" if no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.

14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY:

Identify any health and safety risks posed by the project.

The proposed project will not change human safety in the area.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

Identify how the project would add to or alter these activities.

The results of this project will not affect the industrial, commercial, or agricultural activities or production in the area.

16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT:

Estimate the number of jobs the project would create, move or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to the employment market.

This project will not create any new jobs, as the project will be completed in house by the proponent.

17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES:

Estimate tax revenue the project would create or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to taxes and revenue.

The proposed action will add to the tax revenue.

18. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES:

Estimate increases in traffic and changes to traffic patterns. What changes would be needed to fire protection, police, schools, etc.? Identify cumulative effects of this and other projects on government services

This project is of a small scale and being funded by Marias River Electric Cooperative, Inc. There will be no excessive stress placed on the existing infrastructure of the area.

19. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS:

List State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, and other zoning or management plans, and identify how they would affect this project.

The proposed action is in compliance with State and County laws. No other management plans are in effect for the area.

20. ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES:

Identify any wilderness or recreational areas nearby or access routes through this tract. Determine the effects of the project on recreational potential within the tract. Identify cumulative effects to recreational and wilderness activities.

The proposed project area is adjacent to Kelleher Road and Mozer Road, both of which generally have low recreational value. The tract is legally accessible and the proposed action is not expected to impact general recreational and wilderness activities on this state tract.

21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING:

Estimate population changes and additional housing the project would require. Identify cumulative effects to population and housing

The proposal does not include any changes to housing or developments.

No direct or cumulative effects to population or housing are anticipated.

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:

Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

There are no native, unique or traditional lifestyles or communities in the vicinity that would be impacted by the proposal.

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:

How would the action affect any unique quality of the area?

The proposed action will not impact the cultural uniqueness or diversity of the area.

24. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:

Estimate the return to the trust. Include appropriate economic analysis. Identify potential future uses for the analysis area other than existing management. Identify cumulative economic and social effects likely to occur as a result of the proposed action.

This project will benefit the school trust in terms of the \$50.00 fee generated from the easement application. The easement on the Common Schools trust land will affect 4.834 acres X \$450.00 per acre equals \$2,175.30 of revenue generated from the future easement. Cumulative impacts are not likely as the area is used for agriculture and the overhead power distribution line will not affect the long-term viability of agriculture on this tract.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	Name: Tony Nickol	Date: November 8, 2012
	Title: Land Use Specialist, Conrad Unit, Central Land Office	

V. FINDINGS

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

Alternative B (the Proposed action) – Grant Marias River Electric Cooperative, Inc. permission to install the new overhead power distribution line.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

The applicant is applying for permission to cross about 2 miles of state land with above ground power line. The power line is located on the east and south section lines, adjacent to county roads. Significant impacts are not anticipated as a result of the selected alternative. No archaeological features have been identified within the project area. Disturbed areas of CRP will be reclaimed and reseeded in accordance with specifications outlined in this EAc. The surface lessee's have been notified and actual damages have been settled. Easement values are estimated at \$450.00 per acre.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

☐


EIS

☐

More Detailed EA

☒

No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	Name: Erik Eneboe
	Title: Conrad Unit Manger, CLO, DNRC
Signature: 	
Date: November 8, 2012	

